

**STATEMENT OF DERRICK FOX,
CHAIRMAN, FOOTBALL BOWL ASSOCIATION**

DECEMBER 7, 2005

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, and Chairman Barton, my name is Derrick Fox and I am the Chairman of the Football Bowl Association and also President and Chief Executive Officer of the MasterCard Alamo Bowl in San Antonio, Texas. I am here today representing the twenty-eight members of the Football Bowl Association, a group that includes every post-season Bowl game from the members of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) to the smallest of the post-season events. They range in age from the Rose Bowl, which has been in existence for 92 years, to the three-year old Fort Worth Bowl.

Our association has been in existence for nearly a quarter century and we have grown as the numbers of Bowls has grown.

Your purpose in holding this hearing is to examine the possibilities and potential of a post-season college football playoff. My purpose in appearing before you today is to tell you that the current Bowl system, for whatever flaws it may have, is more than just alive and kicking. The slogan of the Football Bowl Association is "Where Everybody Wins."

It is a system which benefits – in its current form – more than five thousand student-athletes, 11,000 band members, between 50,000 and 100,000 performers and millions of fans and community members. It is a system that attracts more fans than the Super Bowl, World Series, NBA Finals and NHL Stanley – combined. We did it last year and we will do it again – and probably better it – this year. To create a formalized post-season college football playoff, whether of 16 teams and 15 games or eight teams and seven games or even four teams and three games is to risk the destruction of the current system.

If you don't believe the current Bowl Game system works, let me point to a specific circumstance right here in Washington (and in Raleigh, North Carolina) ten days ago. The University of Maryland and North Carolina State were playing in Raleigh on November 26. Each school had a 5-5 record. The winner of the Maryland-N.C. State game would go to a Bowl; the loser would go home. Think there wasn't interest in that game? What would have been the importance of it without a Bowl Game invitation on the line? Think of the impact on that game and on those fans if there were no Bowl to which the winner might be invited and then think of the result of creating a post-season playoff.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, let me describe to you first the current status of the Bowls and what they mean to the communities and schools and then what would happen with the advent of a post-season college football playoff.

CURRENT POST-SEASON STRUCTURE

A total of twenty-eight post-season Bowl Games are played in twenty-four communities across the United States during the months of December and January. Four cities will host two games.¹ In the past year, these 28 games attracted just under 1.5 million fans, an average of 53,286, or 90% of capacity. Eleven of the games drew more than 100% capacity. And to those who say there is an overabundance of games, we note that average attendance went up last year. In fact, for games that have been in existence for at least six years, attendance has increased by 6.5% over that period. And of those games that have been in existence for six years, they sold 98.5% of their capacity.

The opponents of the current Bowl Game system who complain about too many games on television don't point to the fact that 109 million households watched games last year, 27% more than watched last year's Super Bowl. It's obvious that people want to watch the games.

¹ In years past, Phoenix-Tempe, Orlando, and New Orleans have hosted two post-season Bowl games. This year, as a result of Hurricane Katrina, Atlanta will host two games, the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl and the Nokia Sugar Bowl, while the Wyndham New Orleans Bowl has been moved to Lafayette, LA. Also, this year the former Silicon Bowl in Fresno has become San Diego's Poinsettia Bowl.

Benefits to the Communities

What does it mean to the 24 (or 25) communities where the games are held? For one thing, since virtually all the post-season Bowl Games are put on by charitable groups and since up to one-quarter of the proceeds from the game are dedicated to the community, local charities receive tens of millions of dollars every year.

Excluding the television and print exposure that these communities get, it has been estimated that the Bowl games generate \$1.1 billion in annual economic impact. Fans make the Bowl experience a holiday experience, spending up to a week in the community, supporting post-Christmas business in hotels, restaurants, and visitor attractions. And this doesn't even take into account events such as the Tournament of Roses Parade or other events, centered around the game itself.

For example, the estimated impact of Bowl Games ranged from nearly a quarter billion dollars from last year's Rose Bowl to \$4 million in Boise for the MPC Computer Bowl.

Moreover, the title sponsor or presenting sponsor of a Bowl Game frequently is a commercial institution headquartered in the host city, whose integration into the community – and vice versa – is enhanced by the game itself.

Benefits to the Institutions

This year, 56 institutions will participate in Bowl Games. That's 48% of Division 1-A programs. Some of the opponents of the current system have complained that this is too many, but who is to make that judgment? What is wrong with rewarding winning teams with a post-season trip for the players and fans? Perhaps Auburn Head Coach Tommy Tuberville said it best in August, 2003: "I like the bowls because it rewards a lot of teams in college football... I'm totally against a playoff."

(In fact, this 48% number should be compared to the teams that make the tournaments in men's and women's basketball – 20% -- and those that make the Division I-AA football playoffs – 13%.)

But the raw numbers of participants do not reveal the whole story. In the 2004-05 Bowl Game season, \$187.5 million was paid out to the participating institutions, many of whom, under conference rules, shared that payout with other schools. In other words, schools that don't even qualify for the Bowls have a stake in Bowl Game revenue. In fact, more than 100 institutions shared in the Bowl Game payouts this past year. These team payouts generally are used to pay for scholarships for athletes in sports programs that are without broad marketplace support (*i.e.*, "non-revenue sports"). Moreover, it's expected that the payouts will increase to \$193 million this year and, over the next ten years, it's estimated that the Bowl Game payouts to institutions will total \$2.2 billion.

Intangible benefits also flow to the institutions. Bowl Game appearances generate contributions to the institution and even increases in applications. From the Athletics Department standpoint, it can lead to additional season ticket sales, licensing income, and media exposure and contracts.

Benefits to the Fans and Players

Fans that travel to the Bowl Games enjoy the spectacle of college football, often combined with a late-year vacation, whether it's in Florida, Texas, California or any of the other ten states where Bowl Games are played.

But it's not just those college football fans who revel in the Bowl Game experience. This past season, in addition to the 5,600 student-athletes, some 11,000 band members, and 1,100 cheerleaders, up to 100,000 halftime performers, plus alumni and administrators and all those in the host communities took part.

Playoff proponents argue that the only Bowl Game that matters each year is the BCS national championship and that no other Bowl Game matters. Such statements simply are not true. Student-athletes and coaches who are in any of the Bowl Games treat the experience as one of the most important of their careers. Winning a Bowl Game is a lifelong memory for players and coaches – as

well as the fans – and it is a particularly meaningful experience for the young men who play college football. As Tommy West, the head coach at Memphis said so succinctly:

“To see our players and fans after the [New Orleans Bowl last year] ... well, you can’t take that away. There’s nothing wrong with 28 teams being happy at the end of the year.”

Likewise, anyone who criticizes the current Bowl Game structure should note the following comment from *The Tampa Tribune* this past January 1, before the Wisconsin-Georgia Outback Bowl:

“Maybe no one outside of Wisconsin and Georgia much cares who wins this game, but so what? A lot of people came to town, soaked up some sun, ate some good food, had a ball. At the end of it all, they play a football game and somebody wins. Actually everybody wins. Imagine that.”

A PLAYOFF WOULD CAUSE MORE HARM THAN GOOD

The uniqueness of what the current system of Bowl Games brings to college football would be lost by the institution of a playoff system. There are three basic approaches that have been suggested for a playoff: (a) a Division 1-A Playoff Tournament; (b) a Division 1-A Playoff after the Bowls; and (c) a Division 1-A Playoff using the Bowls. No matter what system you chose, they are all flawed and the net result would be that the existing Bowl Game structure would simply disappear, along with the benefits, for all but a few teams.

Division 1-A Playoff Tournament

Why not replace the current Bowl Game structure with a Division 1-A Tournament similar to basketball? Sixty-four teams – probably a number with losing records – would be more than the 56 teams which play currently in the Bowls. Such a proposal ignores the fact that a football team can play once a week, while basketball teams in the NCAA Tournament play twice a week, wrapping up the

Tournament in three weeks of March Madness. The comparable size football tournament would be December-January-February Insanity.

More realistically, why not a 16 team playoff? By definition, you would cut out nearly half the game sites. Who is going to make the determination that my Alamo Bowl in San Antonio, in existence for decades, serving the local community and the college athletics community, can no longer be in business?

And if you think you have issues now with teams that are not playing for the national championship, multiply that by the fact that this year there are 19 teams with nine victories or more. Which three 9-2 teams – teams which won 82% of their games – are you going to eliminate from any post-season play?

Games would be played on campus, as fans would not travel in necessary numbers to multiple locations. Teams would treat it like a typical road game, flying in the day before, instead of a week prior.

The regular season in college football – the most important regular season of any college sport – would be undermined. A loss to an underdog or an early season loss to a rival would simply result in a lower seeding in the tournament. A team could afford to lose a couple of games and still win the national championship (as long as it made the playoffs), because like college basketball, the real season would be the tournament. Everything prior is just “positioning”; just get to the tournament and run off three or four victories and you are the national champion.

In today’s college regular season, every game is important if you aspire to the national title. Games in September can determine whether you have a shot. It intensifies every Saturday during the regular season, affecting everything from ticket sales to television revenue for these games. As one observer put it, “Division 1-A already has a playoff; it’s called the regular season.”

College administrators also point out that a Division 1-A playoff replacing the Bowl Games would mean more games creating more classes missed, more pressure on the players, and more commercialism in college football.

It's no wonder that the vast majority of college presidents, directors of athletics and coaches do not favor a playoff.

Division 1-A Playoff After the Bowls

A playoff after the Bowl Games is merely a prelude to the end of the current system, where all of the focus will be on those games. And if a four-team/three-game playoff is good, why wouldn't an eight-team or 16-team playoff be even better?

How will the teams be picked? Who will be left out? Suppose there are three undefeated teams and one with a 9-2 record; who is responsible for creating the matchups?

Finally, if you had two undefeated teams going into the playoffs – as you had in 2002-03 (Miami and Ohio State) and this year (Southern Cal and Texas), why should those teams have to play an extra game to meet one another?

Division 1-A Playoff Using the Bowls

There are those who attempt to strike a middle ground by saying they would create a Division 1-A Playoff, but would continue to use the existing Bowl Game structure. These people are living in a fantasy world. A playoff attempting to use the existing Bowl Game structure is doomed to failure and in itself dooms the current system, which has served collegiate athletics so well.

Dr. Myles Brand, the President of the NCAA and a former university president at Oregon, takes this view:

“If you have a playoff, you threaten [the smaller bowls] as well as some of the mid-level bowls...[T]he bowl system gives a much wider range of opportunities for more student-athletes

to be involved, more alumni and fans to celebrate. Not everyone has to raise their finger No. 1 to be part of a winning season and football right now.”

Consider the following with a proposed playoff using the existing Bowl structure:

- How – and who? – will determine which Bowl Games will be the survivors to be made part of a playoff structure?
- What happens to those Bowl Games who do not make the “cut”? Who replaces the contributions that would go to the institutions which do not play? Who replaces the funds that go to local charities that benefit from the local game? What replaces the economic activity at the game site?

Let’s assume that a 16-team, 15-game playoff structure is created. What is likely to happen to the current status:

- First, nearly half the existing Bowls – the remaining 13 – will immediately suffer. It is comparable to the appeal of basketball’s National Invitation Tournament, which limped along in various incarnations after the NCAA Tournament expanded, until it was finally bought by the NCAA.
- The remaining Bowls – those that are part of that playoff structure – themselves will change in nature. Except for one, they will all simply become a prelude to the championship game. The aura of Bowl week will no longer exist;
- Host communities, faced with the loss of the Bowl Game ambience, will no longer turn out in support of the Bowl Game effort;
- Fans won’t travel the way they do today. The 10,000-30,000 fans which might follow the team to a Bowl site today may wait to see if the team makes it into the championship. They won’t travel to the early games and certainly wouldn’t travel three weeks in a row;

- If they do travel to the Bowl playoff site, they won't spend the better part of a week there; rather a day or two would be the norm. This will not be the vacation journey that it is today;
- Faced with the potential of significantly increased travel costs covering multiple weeks, the teams likely would arrive the day before a game, not spend the entire week at the Bowl site. It's merely an away game;
- Faced with the absence of Bowl sites, such a playoff would end up relying on campus stadiums sites of one of the participants, like professional football; and.
- Non-playoff Bowl Games, reduced to a post-season-NIT-type of existence, would simply close down.

Playoff Financial Considerations

Everyone points to the “boxcar” numbers that a playoff would produce, ignoring the fact that the existing Bowl Game structure will produce nearly \$200 million this year for the institutions and projects \$2.2 billion over the next decade. A proposal made a few years ago offered \$2.5 billion over a ten year period to take over the BCS Bowls and add a three-game playoff after the Bowls. The company that made the offer went bankrupt recently leaving its international business partners in the lurch. So much for boxcar dollars!

CONCLUSION

No system is perfect. The Bowls are not perfect and the Bowl Championship Series is not perfect. But certainly, the concept of a playoff – as attractive as it may sound from the “experts” on Sports Talk radio this time of year – is rife with dangers for a system that has served collegiate athletics pretty well for the past nearly one hundred years.

It's easy to express support for a playoff concept which has never been tested; all of your assumptions and theories work out perfectly. On the other hand, however, the Bowls have already withstood the test of time and have not been found wanting.

With the current structure of the Bowl Games, you protect the importance of the college football regular season and, as importantly, you have twenty-four communities committed to providing not just the financial support, but a quality experience for the thousands of players and fans who attend each Bowl Game.

The current Bowl Game system does reward over 5600 student-athletes, creates over \$1 billion in combined economic impact to the host sites, donates nearly \$200 million annually back to higher education, and gives millions more to charitable endeavors in their own communities.

It is a system that works well, benefits so many, and ought not to be under attack.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.